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AUTHOR Navaratnam, Kathiravelu K.
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ABSTRACT

The functional and organizational activities of the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States can be an appropriate means for providing a new image and concept to the kind of extension service that is needed in developing nations and Sri Lanka in particular. The problems of the extension program in developing nations are inherited and related to the manner in which the extension service is organized and delivers services to clients. Generally speaking, the following problems are associated with unsuccessful extension services in developing countries: lack of a formal functional relationship between extension and relevant educational institutions, a top-to-bottom-based program planning process, a lack of unified job descriptions for extension workers, and an inefficient support system. The following strategies should be adopted to address these problems: (1) extension programs should be linked with institutions similar to the U.S. land-grant universities, (2) program planning should start at the local level, (3) extension agents should avoid nonextension activities, and (4) an extension support system focusing on information should be developed. (MN)

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PERSPECTIVE OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE FROM THIRD WORLD POINT OF VIEW

Kathiravelu K. Navaratnam, Ed.D.
Center for Volunteer Development
207 West Roanoke Street, Virginia Tech,
Blacksburg, Va 24061
(703) 961-5812

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PERSPECTIVE OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE FROM THIRD WORLD POINT OF VIEW

Many consultants, visitors, colleagues, and friends have identified unique characteristics of the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States which could be transferred to the third world countries desiring to strengthen their extension programs. Those unique characteristics shared with other countries are usually accepted by extension personnel as an imaginary ideal of the organizational and functional framework of not only the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States but extension programs in general. An extensive study involving personal on site observations and experiences on how the extension service performs its educational functions in the United States with implications for the Sri Lanka led us to take a broad look at its current applications to the third world.

Problems of Extension Programs in the Third World

The extension service in the third world has generally failed to reach out to its clients in helping them to solve their felt needs. This situation has not only disappointed many extension professional serving as consultants in the these countries but it also left the recipients in the third world frustrated. The problems of the extension program in the third world are inherited and they are related to the manner in which the extension service organized and delivers services to its clients. This lack of formal functional relationship between extension and relevant educational institutions, in addition to the top-to-bottom based program planning process, a lack of unifies job descriptions of extension workers, and an inefficient support system are closely associated with an unsuccessful extension service in the third world counties.

Understanding these common extension problems through a first hand experience provided a direct impetus and desire to study the perspectives of the Cooperative Extension Service in the Unites Sates from the point of view of gaining some insight for improving the extension service in the third world countries. After a thorough review of the literature and personal observations, the functional and organizational activities of the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States can be an appropriate means for providing a new image and concept to the extension service which is needed in the third world.

Extension Programs should e Linked with Institutions Similar to the Land-grant Universities

Extension programs are educational in nature and, therefore, it is appropriate to establish a formal functional relationship between extension and the relevant educational institutions, specially the land-grant institutions. The lost image of the extension service in many third world countries could be gained through institutional arrangement with universities that have similar missions of the U.S. land-grant colleges. This organizational linkage will also increase the availability of resources and personnel to expand and to specialize the activities of the extension service for diversified communities. Since there are government supported national level educational institutions in third world countries, implementation of such linkages is highly possible and should be encouraged.

Program Planning Needs to Start at the Local Level

In the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States, the county is the focal point for planning and implementing the extension educational programs. In contrast, program planning in the third world is treated as it it were a single unified approach directed from the national level. Thus there is a lack of knowledge of local problems and the day-today difficulties facing extension workers and their clientele. People who are responsible for implementing the extension program on the local level must be given an opportunity to participate in the program planning process and their beliefs, values, and inputs should be considered in program planning. This is possible only through decentralizing the program planning process to the local level. Since the extension service is the third

world already contains a local unit in the organizational set up, there is an immediate potential for using the local unit as a focal point for program planning.

Extension Agents Should Avoid Non-extension Activities

Many of the problems facing extension agents in the third world arise from what they do rather than what they are supposed to do as a change agent. Extension agents are encouraged to perform into non-extension activities which eventually becomes a part of their job descriptions. Adapting the plan of work common for each county unit in the U.S. would be a simple and viable solution to overcome this problem. An extension system having job descriptions could help to eliminate duplication of activities by the various agencies when efforts are made to advice and to help the same target clients in the local communities of the third world.

An Extension Support System should Focus upon Information

An extension agency can only be dynamic with an adequate extension support system. In the third world, the true meaning of the support system is misunderstood by both the extension agency and its clientele in that the clients see the extension service as the retail outlet for inputs, credits, and other necessities for the production function. In many cases, the clients are traditionally conditioned to expect that all of their needs will be provided by extension agents. In the United States, the support system complements the educational objectives to be achieved through the extension programs. The extension service is not a delivery point for inputs and other supplies but rather a source of information. It is very important

to change the current concept of the support system held by the third world it it is to be effective and supportive of the extension service's mission.

Conclusion

Many of the possible solutions given to the problems of the extension service in the third world are based upon personal experiences and observations of the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States. Considering the state of advancement of the third world in science and technology as well as the need to improve the extension service, the Cooperative Extension Service in the United States has the capability to demonstrate to the third world what the purposes of the extension are; how it is organized; how resources are allocated and utilized; how programs are developed, implemented and evaluated; and what support is needed for the extension organization. If institutions working with third world countries would focus on the questions just highlighted, the needed changes in the extension service would move ahead more rapidly, generating a stronger agricultural sector in these countries. Furthermore, local agents in the U.S. can assist in this sharing of ideas by volunteering information or responding to requests of visitors from the third world who desire a first hand knowledge of how the extension service really world at the local level. In effect, the Cooperative Extension Service at all levels in the United States has the opportunity to serve as a change agent for extension programs in the third world.

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